



The Rev. Alan Sutherland, Rector

October 25, 2009

## Pentecost 21

Last week I preached about the disciples just not getting it.

Our gospel today comes right after that story where the disciples don't get it and some theologians believe it is placed here to illustrate that after all Jesus has said and done the disciples are still blind to his message and his purpose.

That may be somewhat true. But I think there is a deeper meaning to this story and it is not to do with the man being blind or receiving his sight. When you read the bible story that ended last week and the beginning of today's gospel our lectionary for some reason misses out a line. It reads "they came to Jericho". The next sentence where we begin today tells us they were leaving Jericho. We are told of no purpose of being in Jericho. Nothing happened in Jericho. They came and they went. It was just a place to go through. Yet Jericho had a significant place in Jewish history. Joshua who was the successor to Moses captured Jericho on route to Jerusalem. Joshua ordered that Jericho should not be inhabited and unfortunately we are not told in the book of Joshua the reason for that. But Jericho could not have been too bad a place because King Herod had a summer home there. Maybe it was just a noisy place. I say that because if you remember, the fall of Jericho is very famous. In Josh 6;10, Joshua gave this command; you shall not shout or let your voice be heard, nor shall you utter a word, until the day I tell you to shout. Then you shall shout. And they shouted and they shouted until, as the song tells us- the walls came a tumbling down.

ST. JOHN'S EPISCOPAL CHURCH

*Established in 1847*

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Jericho was famous because it was captured by shouting.

So today we have Jesus coming and almost immediately leaving Jericho. No small talk, no teaching, nothing.

But as he is leaving he is being shouted at. This was the blind beggar's chance and he was not going to let it go. He shouted because he knew he would not be noticed. Even when told to be quiet he shouted even louder. He shouted to make his voice heard. He shouted because he had a need and was not being listened to. He shouted because he believed he could have a new chance of a different life. He shouted because he believed there was a chance he would be heard by Jesus.

He shouted because he was not being noticed.

He did not have sight but he certainly had voice. And it was his voice that gave him his opportunity for a moment with Jesus.

Now I am not saying that we should all begin to shout everything, although there used to be a group called the shouting Methodists, but what I am saying is that we need to be paying attention to those who in many ways are crying out and even shouting.

Those who are hurting and wounded. Those who have been forgotten and left behind. Those who for some reason have been made to feel unworthy and unacceptable. Those who cry out for someone just to love them and pay a little attention.

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For someone just to notice that they exist.

We do not have to listen too hard to hear the shouting in the world in which we live. And we do not have to become somebody miraculous to pay a little attention to the shouting.

But we do have to become somebody who is willing to see all people as children of god. To pay attention to those who are crying out for a little recognition that they simply exist and that they are worthy of acknowledgement as a human being.

You know for so long this blind man had been assured of his unworthiness. He was worth nothing except the crumbs that were thrown him. His place, that those in authority assured him, was like this because of his sin or his parent's sin and his unworthiness was fixed for all time and there was no changing that. There were no schools for the blind, no Braille to encounter him with the world, no chance of anything. He was worthless in the eyes of society and that unworthiness was affirmed in him every day.

His cry to Jesus was a shout of hope and a small chance to make life different.

But up until that point every day his cry was from his heart just to be acknowledged by the passers by. To be spoken to, to be affirmed, to be noticed.

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We do not have blind beggars in our community, but I do suggest the next time you go Kroger or k mart or wherever to take a serious look around and try to listen from the heart to the people you see.

You know we have people in this community who go to the stores every day just for somewhere to go to be with people. They may not be blind beggars, but they are our neighbors and there is the same cry from the heart. A cry to be noticed, acknowledged, even affirmed that they just exist.

So speak to them. Look them in the eye, say hello, smile at them, and acknowledge them. You may not get a response and that is ok but for the most part you will.

You see I believe this gospel story is about the response of Jesus to the man's shouting. Jesus heard and Jesus listened and Jesus acknowledged a human being who was deemed to be unworthy.

We are the ones called to be the listeners and to pay attention.

In our worship and in our community of faith and in our living we are called to affirm the worthiness of all Gods' children, and to be vigilant about welcoming the stranger and the visitor.

We are called to pay attention to the words we use in our worship and in our conversations to affirm the simple existence of another child of God. We are called to pay attention to the actions we show in our welcoming and in our accepting.

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We are called to listen. And we are more importantly called to respond. Because sometimes the shout is nothing less than a still small voice

Amen

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